



COMMITTEE of the WHOLE

CITY COUNCIL

MINUTES
January 29, 2007
6:30 P.M.
Council Office

COUNCIL MEMBERS PRESENT:

J. Waltman, S. Fuhs, S. Marmarou, M. Baez, M. Goodman-Hinnershitz

OTHERS IN ATTENDANCE:

C. Kanezo, C. Younger, L. Churchill, L. Kelleher, A. Mukerji, L. Olson, F. Gilyard

Vaughn Spencer, President of Council, called the Committee of the Whole meeting to order at 5:00p.m.

I. African American Museum

Mr. Olson presented a conceptual plan for the proposed Central Pennsylvania African American Museum. Mr. Olson explained the approach to the design of the museum is unique. The museum would combine exhibit, meeting, and administrative and retail lease space. Providing retail lease space would allow for the possibility of revenue generation, with any revenue earned applied to the operating costs of the museum. Mr. Olson described how the museum façade would complement the aesthetics of the neighborhood, keeping with the style of the existing housing. The museum is looking at opening in June 2009.

Mr. Mukerji stated the administration is very supportive of a Central Pennsylvania African American Museum. However, Council must be aware of the obstacles standing in the way of completing the project in a timely fashion. Eleven properties must be acquired and demolished before construction can begin. Without the land the project is hopeless. Of the eleven properties, Ken Pick, working on behalf of the County, has been able to acquire one property through friendly sales. Mr. Mukerji explained that many of the property owners are not inclined to sell because they realize an outside entity is interested in the properties.

Mr. Churchill stated that in order for the project to be successful, the City would need to become directly involved. City ownership of the project would provide financial assistance and eminent domain powers. Mr. Mukerji cautioned against using Federal dollars for property acquisition. He explained that once Federal dollars were used, Federal housing relocation regulations had to be followed. These regulations require displaced occupants be relocated to properties of same or greater value; in almost all instances persons being displaced relocate to homes of greater value, greatly increasing the costs of property acquisition. Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz inquired how to avoid Federal regulations. Mr. Mukerji stated avoiding Federal regulations is simple: don't use Federal dollars to acquire properties.

Mr. Olson informed Council that the total project cost of the museum is estimated at 6.7 million dollars. Governor Rendell has already set aside three million dollars in State aide. Mr. Mukerji noted that the aide committed by the Governor is in the form of a reimbursement grant. A reimbursement grant requires the amount of the grant be raised from external sources, spent, and then submitted to the State for reimbursement. Mr. Mukerji also stated he felt the \$500,000.00 estimated for property acquisition was very low, due to the provisions of the Uniform Housing Relocation Act, which had been discussed earlier.

Mr. Gilyard and Mr. Olson discussed the type and quality of exhibits and the need to properly preserve important historical artifacts in an appropriately dignified setting. Mr. Gilyard stated the history that would be preserved by the museum is not just African American history; it is the history of the United States, the history of a time when our young nation was coming to terms with injustice and inequality. Mr. Waltman stated he appreciates the historical significance of the Church and accepts the need to preserve such important history through a permanent museum.

Mr. Churchill informed Council that the Administration proposes the museum be one of three development projects undertaken by the City in 2007. Both Mr. Fuhs and Mr. Waltman believed that City ownership of the project would be ideal, as City resources could be used.

II. Unallocated CDBG Funds

Mr. Churchill presented a list of items that would be removed from the Capital budget and funded with CDBG dollars. The East Reading pool, Northwest pool, downtown security cameras and Pagoda renovations are all projects that will be supported by CDBG dollars. Mr. Fuhs asked if other projects could be added to the list. Mr. Churchill explained the projects he just described are projects that had been removed from the Capital budget due to the ability to fund with CDBG dollars. Other projects can certainly be proposed, but would need to be approved by CD staff.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz believed Pagoda renovations are needed and appropriate given the upcoming Hundredth anniversary. Mr. Churchill indicated the Mayor has committed the City to improving the Pagoda and surrounding property before any anniversary celebrations occur.

III. Charter Amendments

Mr. Waltman asked if limitations existed on the number of amendments that could be proposed during a given year. Mr. Younger remarked that he is not aware of any specific case law limiting the number of amendments that could be proposed. He referred to the recent consideration of five amendments by the City of Allentown. Mr. Younger noted that as a practical matter Council should consider imposing limits, so as to not confuse the voters. Mr. Waltman asked if any members of Council had already considered possible amendments. Mr. Younger stated the Solicitors Office recommends Council consider amending the referendum and initiative provisions of the Charter. Mr. Younger suggested Council propose an amendment adopting the appropriate provisions of the Third Class City Code, which prohibit the repeal, through referendum, of any item determined to be in the interest of public health or safety.

Mr. Waltman stated there are many issues for Council to consider and time needs to be provided to do so. Mr. Waltman asked each member of Council to prioritize the amendments. Ms. Kelleher offered to prepare a list of amendments and distribute the list to Council for their consideration. Mr. Fuhs thought this was a reasonable idea. Mr. Waltman asked Ms. Kelleher to prepare a list of possible amendments and schedule a discussion of the amendments for the next Committee of the Whole meeting.

The Committee of the Whole adjourned at 8:30p.m.

Respectfully Submitted

By: _____
Linda A. Kelleher, City Clerk